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## **MAKING TRIFLES OF TERRORS**

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MAKING TRIFLES OF TERRORS

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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the Upper Division Honors Program.

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& Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	2
ABSTRACT.....	4
DEVELOPMENT.....	5
IDEAS.....	7
ARTISTIC INFLUENCES.....	10
CONCLUSION.....	11
FIGURES.....	12
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	20



## ABSTRACT:

“Caricature requires two basic artistic impulses: to observe reality objectively, to transform it subjectively. In order to become aware of the deformities that nature has given man, the artist must bring natural, everyday and common things within the range of his experience.”<sup>1</sup>

In my drawings and paintings, I am interested in caricaturizing over-indulgence to stage events where figures stand for verbs, performing ambiguous actions upon which the viewer can implant his or her own history. This writing explores artistic sources and materials that have helped shape my understanding of contemporary art and my desired visual language. The included drawings, prints, and paintings reflect the development, exploration and growth contributing to my compulsion to distort and parody self-destruction by consumption, excess, lasciviousness, and over-dependency. The thoughtful, mechanical, and intuitive processes of drawing and painting become both a mental and physical expulsion of internal demons, staging uncomfortable settings bordering on the perverse, derived from perceived and imagined realities.

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<sup>1</sup> Werner Hofman, *Caricature from Leonardo to Picasso*. (London, 1957), 15

## DEVELOPMENT:

“Only comparison can arrange the diversity of phenomena into one connected world of forms: it can discover the norm of ideal beauty, as well as the departure from this norm and the opposite pole, ugliness. Once objective beauty has been laid down as the ideal artistic form, the artistic imagination can carry out a counter-movement and invent the ideal type of deformity, caricature. However acute the observation of reality may be, and however realistic its artistic result, these are not enough if the artist lacks insight into the dialectic tension between the well-proportioned and the disproportioned.”<sup>2</sup>

I am driven to create night landscapes and figure studies from the phenomenological world that can both inform and translate into later works. (Fig.1) The night becomes a time to create in isolation; the shroud of pulsating incandescent streetlights against the sky encases me into a space that is both alluring and frightening. From these studies I derive compositions, colors and personifications of space. The empty spaces are full of potentiality and expectation of some action happening before or after the painting. Representational and observational paintings reveal the distortions I am naturally inclined to create. I study the figure to attain an understanding of flesh on bone, and gestures derived directly from observation. (Fig.2) These studies give me the analytical knowledge to create satirical sketches from memory (Fig.3, 4). The exaggerated colors that result

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 16

in painting the landscape and features in the figure operate as a result of the psychological engagement with the subjects and incite ideas for further exaggerations and caricaturizations. The reconciliation of perceived reality and exaggerations of a figure in space is the source of my questioning,

## IDEAS

In my drawings and paintings, I am interested in caricaturizing over-indulgence to stage events where figures stand for verbs, portraying ambiguous actions for the viewer to implant their own history. Characters and spaces are rooted in images of inebriated friends, memories, oilrigs, night landscapes, and anatomy books, which are collaged and pieced together to create imagined scenes. My imagery is derived from growing up in South Louisiana in a conservative family with a healthy serving of folk-Catholic superstition and mystification of sexuality. The figural distortions from my hand and imagination that arise express repressed perversion, where grotesque intimations of the body and gesture are projections and personifications of internal musings. The female body often charges and initiates the work; confictions with my own body image, fears and anxieties are juxtaposed with resistance to the notion of the feminine ideal. Experiences and memories, perversions and associations arise from marks on the page or the canvases, from which I extract sometimes hybridized, sometimes distorted figures. Making these images reconciles notions of what I consider good and bad, righteous and conniving, social and intimate, desired and repressed, indoctrinated and resisted, serious and humorous.

*Self Indulgence* is an instance where the gesture of contorting, cannibalizing the self, becomes a metaphor for self concern, where eating is a symbol for indulgence. (Fig.5) The figures contort themselves into an infinity sign, intimating the inescapability of our primal concerns and humorously conflating it with the

colloquialisms 'head up her ass' and 'foot in his mouth'. Goya's *Caprichos* are a historical model whose assessment and judgment of contemporary culture begins with the figure: "He began to make use of caricature and to present the human figure distorted by appetites and passions in order to convey the crumbling of rationality under a weighty fabric of social custom".<sup>3</sup>

In *Cowering and Towering*, the female figure connotes verbs: she sits and pushes, gazing and reaching, towering and pushing on the cowering skeletal figure, in a calm struggle that implies mutual acknowledgement and disinterest. (Fig.6) Her interaction with the other character and environment simultaneously supports and dissolves her. The environment is based on a memory of being left to play on an oilrig in the gulf while my dad fished. I remember the playful tubing and platforms fondly, but the imagery becomes more daunting and conflicted with my present-day disdain towards the destructiveness of the oil industry. The color serves to heighten a sense of the imagination, a contrived scenario weighted with sin. The colossal woman is a metaphor for our collective dependency and connectedness to oil, personified by the ghoul in the corner, which we try to suppress but cannot get rid of, nor have the *foresight* to do so. Clearly, I am interested in how apocalyptic scenarios can represent internal conflicts, and how the figure can charge the image

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<sup>3</sup> José López-Rey, *Goya's Caprichos*, Volume 1, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, 57

with meaning beyond my intentions. “in fact, on sober reflection, [I] prefer it this way, confronting something a not quite knowing yet what it is”.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Italo Calvino *If on a Winter's night a traveler* (Harcourt Inc., 1981), 9

## ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

As a young artist in a post-post-modern era, both contemporary and historical artists operate as models in the development of an appealing visual language. The paintings of artists Neo Rauch and David Schnell are examples of degenerating landscapes, where fragmentation intimates and personifies narrative content. (Fig.7, 8) Contemporary figurative painters such as Dana Schutz, Marlena Dumas, and Barnaby Furnas (and their predecessors, for example Francis Bacon) frequently juxtapose exuberantly garish colors with grotesqueries that situate their works within my common interests. (Figures 9, 10)

Historical models that are especially influential include the *Raft of the Medusa* by Gericault, Beckmann's *Night*, and Goya's *Caprichos*, for their manipulations and arrangements of the figures. (Fig.11) Their historical diversity is indicative of the strength of the caricature throughout history as a courier for implanting the human experience into a visual language.

## CONCLUSION

This work has been about allowing imagery to coalesce without interjection, preconceived notions, shame, or expectations for resolution or clarity in the future. By tracing the roots, development, and influences I have explored in my undergraduate career, I hope to impart that the search is on-going, nothing has been determined or set in stone.



FIGURES:



Figure 1: *Night Study*, oil on panel,

2 x 3 feet, 2010



Figure 2: *Figure Study*, oil on

panel, 2 x 4 feet, 2010

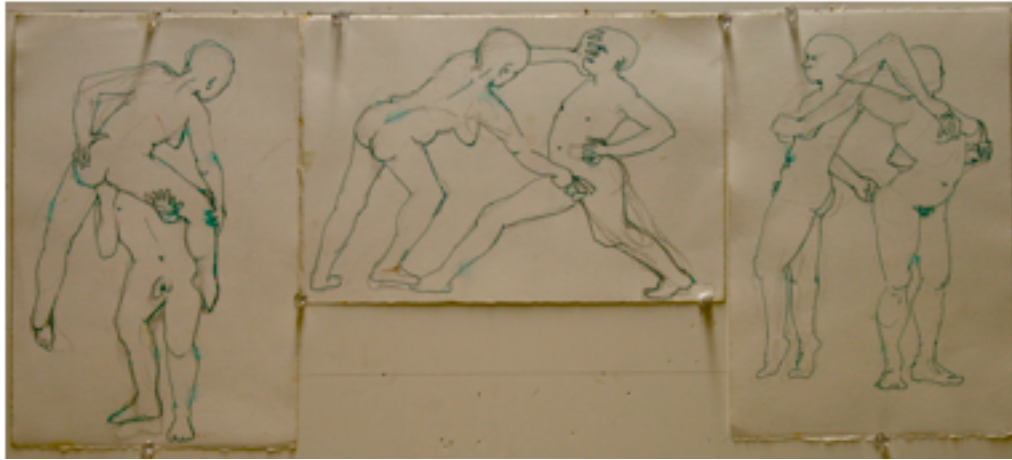


Figure 3:

*Impossible exchanges*, pen and graphite on paper, 9.5 x 10.5 inches, 2010

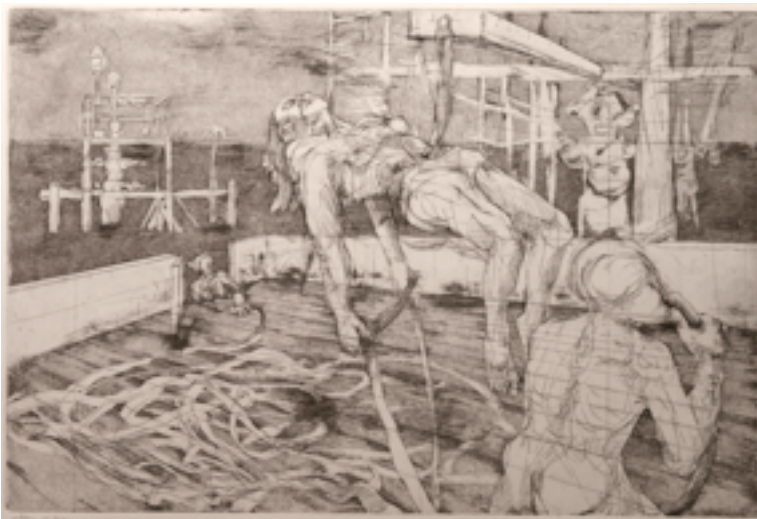


Figure 4, *Untitled*, intaglio

print, 11 x 17 inches, 2010



Figure 5: *Self*

*Indulgence*, intaglio print, 6 x 9 inches, 2010



Figure 6: *Cowering and Towering*, oil on

canvas, 65.5 x 48 inches, 2010



Figure 7: Neo Rauch,

*Seewind*, oil on canvas, 250 x 300 cm, 2009, <http://cgi.eigen-art.com/user-cgi-bin/index.php>



Figure 8: David Schnell, *Bucht*, oil

and acrylic on canvas, 200 x 300 cm, 2008, <http://cgi.eigen-art.com/user-cgi-bin/index.php>





Figure 9: Dana Schutz, *Twin Parts*, 78 x 72

inches, 2004, <http://zachfeuer.com/artists/dana-schutz/>



Figure 10: Marlene Dumas, *The Cover Up*, oil on canvas, 198

x 99 cm, 1994, [http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/marlene\\_dumas\\_resources.htm](http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/marlene_dumas_resources.htm)



Figure 11: Goya, *Los Chinchillas*, aquatint, 1799<sup>5</sup>



Figure 11: Ellen Ogden, *Landscape Study*, Oil on canvas, 4 feet by 2.5 feet, 2010

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<sup>5</sup> José López-Rey, *Goya's Caprichos*, Volume 2, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953, Fig. 189



Figure 12: Ellen Ogden, Landscape Study, Oil on canvas, 24 x 36, 2010





Figure 13: Ellen Ogden, Landscape Study, Oil on canvas, 4'x5', 2010



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